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## Toyota Enviro Outreach Supports Ambitious Aims for International Barcode of Life Project

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Toyota South Africa Motors (TSAM) will this year support the International Barcode of Life (iBOL) project during its annual Enviro Outreach programme which starts today (21 September) at the Klipbokkop 4x4 Academy near Worcester in the Western Cape and will continue until 6 October 2010.

The Enviro Outreach, now in its 10th year under the guidance of Gerhard and Elmarie Groenewald of the Klipbokkop 4x4 Academy, has in the past visited neighbouring countries such as Zimbabwe, Zambia, Namibia, Angola and Botswana on various environmental and scientific missions. This year the Outreach will visit three biodiversity hotspots in South Africa.

The iBOL project, with its origin in Canada, has as its ambitious goal the DNA barcoding of all plant and animal life and collecting it in an open source database (the Barcode of Life Database or BOLD). Locally the project is championed by the University of Johannesburg (UJ) and Prof. Michelle van der Bank of the University's Botany Department with support and involvement by the University of Guelph of Canada.

"The Enviro Outreach remains a core part of Toyota South Africa's strategy and focus on environmental issues. We are very excited about our participation in the iBOL project, especially as South Africa plays a key role in this and the fact that the world this year celebrates the Year of Biodiversity," says Andrew Kirby, Senior Vice President: Sales and Marketing at Toyota South Africa Motors.

A total of 34 biosphere hotspots around the world have been identified as part of the international celebration of the Year of Biodiversity. Enviro Outreach scientists will use Toyota Hilux vehicles to visit the Succulent Karoo, the Cape Floristic Region and the Maputland-Pondoland-Albany region to collect biological samples for the iBOL project.

The international iBOL project has several benefits to scientists and the country in general. The collection of samples will supplement traditional taxonomic identification of plants and animals and has already led to the identification of several new species of plants, insects and animals. These samples will not only contribute to the BOLD database, but will at the same time grow the national collection of species, thereby documenting and safeguarding South Africa's rich natural heritage.

Other benefits include the prevention of illegal trade in protected species, the identification and management of invasive and poisonous plants and the ability to support forensic investigations where traces of biological material are involved.

"We are very proud of the fact that South Africa forms such a pioneering part of the iBOL project and Toyota's support for this initiative. International partners in this project have already praised Prof. Van der Bank and UJ's work in identifying the matK-gene, which is the basis for classifying the world's plant species.

"They have also lauded the breadth and depth of scientific talent in the country and we are privileged to have 17 plant and animal specialists on the Enviro Outreach team," says Kirby.

South Africa has undertaken to barcode 20 000 specimens by April 2011 and a further 40 000 specimens by April 2013 as part of the iBOL project. An ambitious aim of 1 500 barcoded species was set for the Enviro Outreach.

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